

Urban and Community Forestry Program

FACT SHEET

GROWING YOUR COMMUNITY FOREST Developing and Sustaining Community Planting Programs

Look out your window. Drive through your town. Can you find large, beautiful trees? Most Massachusetts communities are blessed to have many older, stately community trees that add character to our communities and improve the environment.

Now imagine what your town would look like without any of these trees!

We owe a debt of gratitude for these pillars of green in our communities to the hard work, vision and foresight of those who came before us. Our ancestors in New England recognized the social, economic and environmental benefits of community trees and forests and made sure that they left this valuable legacy to future generations. Indeed, Massachusetts is thought to have held the first recorded public shade tree planting in the western hemisphere when, in 1646, all the residents of Boston Town gathered to plant a double row of American Elms along the peninsula that connected Boston to the mainland.

Now it is your turn to leave the same legacy to our future and improve our community forests through tree planting.

Why Develop a Community Tree Planting Program?

- ❖ Street trees beautify our communities.
- ❖ They help improve the environment by cleaning the air and water.
- ❖ They provide shade and reduce the “urban heat island” effect.
- ❖ Community plantings can bring neighbors and residents together and strengthen our communities.
- ❖ Most communities remove more public trees than they plant.
- ❖ Tight municipal budgets have resulted in fewer trees planted in recent years.
- ❖ We owe it to the future.

Types of Community Tree Planting Programs.

Municipal Planting Models

The most common type of planting program is one that is municipally sponsored, and organized and implemented by paid town forestry staff. In this type of program, municipal forestry staff (or contractors) will inspect locations for planting, select a species, plant a tree when resources allow and strive to maintain that tree. Often these types of programs are primarily responsive to request

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Department of Environmental Management
Urban and Community Forestry Program
251 Causeway Street, 6th Floor
Boston, MA 02114-1250
Tel: 617 626-1250
www.mass.gov/dem/programs



for trees from residents, and sometimes, public officials or citizen tree boards will identify and target areas that could benefit from new tree plantings.

Advantages: The advantages of this type of program are that professional forestry staff oversees the entire tree planting operation. They can insure that the right tree is planted in the right place, that it is planted properly and that it gets appropriate maintenance. This type of program also requires relatively little community outreach.

Disadvantages: The disadvantages are that the town bears all of the costs of planting and maintenance including labor, and that it encourages little community involvement.

Adopt-A-Tree Models

These types of planting programs are joint partnerships between municipal forestry staff and citizens. For example, the town may advertise the availability of free or shared-cost trees to residents interested in planting and caring for street trees. Interested residents sign-up and fill out a site inspection sheet or have the site inspected by forestry personnel. These residents then come to a central location to receive training in tree planting and care, and receive an appropriate species to plant. Individual residents commit to maintaining these trees. Cities like Springfield have used this model successfully.

Advantages: In this type of program the costs for planting and maintaining the trees are shared between municipal government and citizens. Forestry personnel are still able to insure that the right trees are planted in the right place. These programs train residents in tree care and engage residents in community forestry.

Disadvantages: One disadvantage is that forestry staff must give up some control over where, whether and how the trees are planted and maintained. With this type of program, it is also difficult (but possible) to target certain areas that may be in more need of planting.

Organized Community Planting Models

In these types of programs a municipality, tree board or non-profit group organizes neighborhood residents to complete a neighborhood tree planting. The forestry staff inspects the sites and recommends species. The forestry staff, tree board or non-profit group provides the trees, on-site training and supervision to community volunteers on the planting day. Residents commit to caring for the trees.

Advantages: There are many advantages to this type of program. Municipalities, non-profit groups and citizens share all costs of tree planting and maintenance. Professional staff maintains control over species selection and provides supervision at the planting to insure correct planting procedures. Neighborhood plantings of this type can be targeted to areas of need and bring residents together, strengthening the sense of community and positive achievement.

Disadvantages: This type of program requires fairly extensive community outreach and organization up front and during plantings.

For more information on developing community planting programs or other urban and community forestry issues, please contact DEM's Urban and Community Forestry Program at:

- Eric Seaborn, Acting Program Coordinator, 617-626-1468, eric.seaborn@state.ma.us
- Jane Calvin, Community Action Forester, Eastern Mass, 617-626-1456
- Paul Jahnige, Community Action Forester, Western and Central Mass, 413-577-2966
- www.state.ma.us/dem/programs/forestry/urban/index.htm